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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN NRW ELECTIONS FULL OF SOUND AND FURY  
BUT LITTLE MORE

REF: A. A) 07 DUSSELDORF 22

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[C. C\) BERLIN 967](#)

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[1](#). (U) Summary: While right-wing extremist parties are likely to make gains in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state-wide municipal elections at the end of August, their electoral success will actually be meager in the grand scheme of things. Despite historic difficulty in the region, extreme right parties in NRW, including The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and Pro Koeln, a Cologne-based anti-immigration group, gained a foothold in the 2004 municipal elections by winning seats in a handful of city councils. In the past five years, Pro Koeln has expanded to a state-wide party named Pro NRW and hopes to gain seats in other city councils and county legislatures. Even with some gains at the local level, however, none of the right-wing extremist parties are expected to cross the 5-percent electoral threshold to gain representation in the state parliament following next year's NRW Landtag elections. End Summary.

Right-Wing Extremism in NRW Traditionally Weak

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[2](#). (U) Right-wing parties have traditionally been unable to establish a power-base in NRW, where the SPD has historically dominated the cities and urban counties in the heavily industrialized Ruhr area, and the CDU has had a strong position in the rural counties and in cities outside the Ruhr. In addition to being the most populous state in Germany (22 percent of Germany's population lives here), NRW has the largest Muslim and Turkish populations in Germany, making the state a potential hotbed for xenophobic violence and right-wing politics. In absolute terms, NRW had the highest number of right-wing extremist violent crimes (165) in 2008 of all 16 German states. In actuality, however, with 0.92 of such incidents per 100,000 inhabitants, NRW ranks much lower (11th place), far behind states like Saxony-Anhalt (4.15), Saxony (2.99), Brandenburg (2.80), Thuringia (2.80) and others.

[3](#). (U) Even though a number of smaller right-wing populist parties compete in the upcoming local elections in NRW, Pro NRW/Pro Koeln and the NPD are the only right-wing parties likely to win seats in city and county councils. Both parties are nationalist and include anti-Islam positions in their party platforms, but their support comes from different voter groups. Pro NRW/Pro Koeln, while emphasizing its anti-immigrant and anti-Islam stance, has worked to distance itself from the

neo-Nazi associations of the NPD, although the NPD also claims that it does not endorse National Socialism.

¶4. (U) State electoral rules will also play a role in the expected limited success of small parties in the upcoming municipal elections in NRW. Unlike in state parliament elections where parties must cross an electoral threshold of 5 percent of the popular vote to win seats, in NRW parties are not restricted by this stipulation in municipal elections. The 5-percent threshold has kept parties like the NPD out of the state parliament, meaning they have concentrated their efforts on elections where there are no thresholds.

NPD in NRW Under Observation

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¶5. (U) The NPD has been designated as a right-wing extremist party by the NRW Interior Ministry, and is monitored by the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). Founded in 1964, the NPD advocates against parliamentary democracy, supports pan-Germanism, and is considered by the OPC to be racist, anti-Semitic, revisionist, and to endorse the same elements as the National Socialist movement. Unlike in several West German states in the 1960s and several East German states more recently, the NPD has never come close to winning seats in the NRW state legislature. In the 2004 state-wide municipal elections, however, the NPD gained a seat in every city/county council election in which it ran a candidate. Currently, the NPD holds seats on the city councils of Dortmund and Moenchengladbach, and in the councils for the counties of Ennepe-Ruhr, Heinsberg, Maerkischer Kreis, and Rhein-Sieg. (NRW

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is comprised of 396 cities and communities and 31 counties.) In 2009, the NPD is expected to run in three times as many communities and counties as it did in 2004, but the party is far from reaching its stated goal of having candidates running in every county and large city. The NPD has only 780 party members in NRW, and they tend to be concentrated in large cities or in the urban counties.

¶6. (U) An expert on right-wing extremism for the NRW Interior Ministry explained to Pol/Econ Staff last week that part of the NPD's difficulties in NRW is it so far has been unable to connect to the regional neo-Nazi and skinhead scene as it has done in states in the former East Germany. This lack of connection eliminates a large part of the traditional NPD voting bloc, and hinders its ability to bring in new members. The NPD has also publicly distanced itself from those groups, especially by limiting the number of public protests. Despite this problem, the NPD has almost doubled its public activities in the state. In 2008, the NPD organized 125 public events, an increase from just 68 in 2007.

Anti-Islam Party Pro NRW/Pro Koeln

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¶7. (U) Pro NRW was formally founded in 2007 as an extension of Pro Koeln, which gained prominence in Cologne by opposing the planned construction of a "mega-mosque" in Cologne-Ehrenfeld (reftel A). Pro NRW pursues a right-wing populist agenda, opposing what it refers to as "the Islamization of Europe." In

May 2009 and last year (reftel B), Pro Koeln organized an "Anti-Islamization Congress" in Cologne, which was attended by right-wing parties from the Czech Republic and Belgium as well. Pro Koeln has been monitored by the OPC since 2004, and Pro NRW has been monitored by extension since its inception. The leadership of the organizations is essentially identical, and their platforms, other than opposition to the specific mosque, are identical. Party leaders Markus Beisicht, the Pro Koeln candidate for Lord Mayor of Koeln, and Manfred Rouhs both trace their roots to the Republikaner (REP), a right-wing political party that the OPC stopped monitoring in 2006, after a power struggle led the more radical right-wing elements to quit the party.

¶8. (U) Pro NRW claims to be running candidates in 44 different local or municipal elections this fall. A source within the OPC explained that these numbers are deceptive, however, in that Pro NRW has used voter names from their anti-mosque petition on their candidate list without asking permission. Additionally, Pro NRW has exaggerated the districts or constituencies that their candidates seek to represent. The source further explained that persons who have dropped their candidacies, a particularly likely scenario with pro NRW candidates as the party requires them to finance their own campaigns, are still counted in Pro NRW's numbers.

Comment: Signifying Little, Politically

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¶9. (SBU) The OPC source expects the NPD to pick up a couple of more seats in local councils in the August 30 election, but definitely not enough seats to wield any real legislative power. Furthermore, this is unlikely to lead to electoral success in the state parliament elections in 2010. Likely results for Pro Koeln are harder to pin down because of their consistent numbers-inflation. They are certainly a less powerful party than the OPC thought them to be a year ago, and while they will likely also gain seats, it is doubtful that it will be a major shift in power.

¶10. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.  
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